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AUTHOR Intriligator, Barbara A.
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ABSTRACT

An Inter-Organizational Relationship (IOR) may be used by colleges of education to establish formal arrangements for collaboration with local school systems. This arrangement is designed to allow the member organizations to sponsor joint programs and activities and share decision making to accomplish functions and goals determined jointly by the members. In planning for an IOR, several methods may be used in assessing external and internal resources and in exploring the cooperative environment of the member organizations. Following the planning stage of the IOR, the second phase of the model deals with analyzing the characteristics of the IOR structure and the relationships of member organizations, the types of coordinating mechanisms available to each, and the amount and kind of resources which may be provided by or for each. Interaction processes between the IOR members are also analyzed in this phase. In the final phase of the model, consideration is given to the outcomes of planning for the IOR, and to the operation of IOR functions and activities. (JD)

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CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

Barbara A. Intriligator
University of Maryland - College Park

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American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education

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CREATING CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION

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The Educational Policy Context

The responsibility for the improvement of conditions of professional practice in the public schools has now shifted almost completely to the university and to the local schools themselves. At the same time, schools, colleges and departments of education are becoming increasingly more involved with providing a variety of services directly to the public schools. The development of formalized inter-organizational relationships with the local schools may be a particularly viable strategy for universities to use in trying to administer these service activities.

Indeed, University administrators are now expressing a great deal of interest in the use of inter-organizational arrangements with the public schools as a means of improving the conditions of professional practice in their own institutions. Faculty interaction with practicing public school teachers, counselors and administrators creates a forum within which faculty can do some reality testing of the theories that they advocate. Moreover, because of declining enrollments, of increased budgetary control by local governments, and of demands from community interest groups, the conditions of professional practice have changed, often dramatically, in local school systems. Faculty --even those who have had a great deal of school system experience prior to joining the University system-- need opportunities to renew their understandings of patterns of local school practice. The

presence of a stable and institutionalized inter-organizational arrangement with local school systems in a college of education provides an ongoing mechanism through which the college administrator can provide faculty with such opportunities. This conference has as one of its themes the improvement of conditions of professional practice in schools, colleges and departments of education. Consistent and ongoing institutional interaction with school systems could also serve as a vehicle for organizational and personal renewal that would improve the quality of services that the University delivers.

Today I will present a procedural model for planning an inter-organizational relationship that may be used by schools, colleges and departments of education to establish formal arrangements with local school systems. In this kind of inter-organizational arrangements (which I will now refer to as IOR), member organizations have a perceived commonality of purposes or interests that allows them to collaborate, and thus to sponsor joint programs and activities. Because member organizations define themselves as interdependent, they agree to participate in a shared decision-making process, in order to accomplish the functions and goals of the IOR. Indeed, it is this collaborative focus which differentiates this IOR model from other, more traditional university interactions with local school systems. Copies of an outline of the procedural model were available at the door as you entered the room today.

I developed this model from the research I have conducted over the past four years, designed to identify the conditions that are necessary for successful inter-organizational collaboration. My most recent study was of a field-based doctoral (EdD) program in educational administration that

was initiated in the Fall of 1978 by the Department of Education Policy, Planning and Administration (EPPA) at the University of Maryland. From its earliest planning stages, the program was conceived of as a collaborative effort between the department and five local school systems in the Baltimore metropolitan area. University training programs are typically developed autonomously, with school practitioners playing, if anything, advisory roles. We wanted to depart from this traditional model; the Maryland program was to have a collaborative focus. Our experience has indicated that true collaboration, or shared decision-making, is the most difficult and the most powerfully predictive element in the design of effective inter-organizational relationships.

Deciding to Plan an Inter-Organizational Relationship

General Availability of Resources

To design an IOR, a University administrator needs to be aware of three contextual variables: First, potential external resources that could be used for operationalizing the IOR. If the focus of the Maryland program had been limited to training, then there would have been little hope for outside support. On the other hand, the initial goals of the IOR included the delivery of service to unserved and underserved areas of the state; therefore, there was some initial hope of obtaining external support from various state agencies.

In addition, an assessment should be made of potential resources for the proposed IOR that might be garnered from the larger University system. The proposed inter-organizational arrangement, for example, might be designed to respond to a broader institutional mission. In the Maryland program,

university policy-makers were interested from the start: they wanted the department to bring administrative training for school personnel into the proposed geographic area because other institutions of higher education were planning to develop competing programs. At the present time, we are the only institution in the state certified to award a doctorate in educational administration. Consequently, it was not unlikely that additional university resources (in the form of faculty lines and/or instructional resources) might become available should student enrollments materialize, because the IOR would then fill a boundary protection function for the university system.

There is also a need to review the resources within the College of Education that might be used in support of the proposed IOR. These include staff with specialized skills, expansion and/or interfacing with other programs in the college, and budgetary reallocations to the proposed IOR. In sum, it should be noted that this initial review of external and internal resources will also be useful in determining the nature and amount of member contributions to the inter-organizational arrangement.

The Cooperative Environment

A second contextual variable is the cooperative environment within which the proposed IOR will be planned. One must determine if there are incentives and supports other than resources available to the proposed IOR that are external to the institution, for instance requirements for cooperative planning by a state board for higher education. Also, state departments of education often provide incentives for local school systems to voluntarily consolidate or coordinate the delivery of specialized services in a particular geographic area. University - school system IORs

might be intentionally designed to take advantage of incentives like these. In a similar fashion, one should identify personal and organizational incentives that could be created within the college of education, or the department, that would encourage university personnel to participate in the activities of the IOR. Similarly, one would want to know the importance that participating school systems place on such collaborative arrangements with Universities.

Agreement on a Superordinate Goal

Finally, planners of IORs must identify a common purpose that each of the parties can agree to jointly accomplish through the inter-organizational arrangement. In the Maryland program, the superordinate goal of the planning group was to develop doctoral-level training programs in school administration that would have a "field-based orientation" --that is, programs that would be more responsive to the realities of current administrative practice in the participating school systems, at the same time that they were better informed by the research knowledge base of the University. Interestingly, both school system representatives and members of the University planning group reported an initial commitment to both sides of that theory/practice equation.

In order to agree upon a common goal, planners must be familiar with the separate goals and missions of each of the participating organizations. As a general guideline, the primary purpose for each member to join the IOR will need to be directly related to its internal organizational operations, in order to secure commitment to the proposed inter-organizational relationship.

Otherwise, the IOR activities will be viewed by representatives of each organization as peripheral, rather than central to her/his internal organizational responsibilities.

In sum, the gathering of information about potential resource availability, about the general cooperative environment and about the potential for member agreement on a superordinate goal for the IOR constitutes a preliminary needs assessment, intended to help the University administrator decide whether or not to design an IOR with local school systems. It should be noted that the same assessment process needs to be conducted independently by each of the school systems considering membership in the proposed IOR.

Designing The Inter-Organizational Relationship

Designing an IOR calls for attention to be paid to two major aspects of organization design: (1) the development of an appropriate inter-organizational structure, through which linkages can be developed among member organizations, and (2) the delineation of processes of inter-organizational interaction that will facilitate shared decision-making, or collaboration. I will selectively review some of the most salient features of IOR design in this presentation, and will be glad to expand on any other area during our discussion period.

Types of Coordinating Mechanisms in the IOR

Selection of an appropriate coordinating mechanism is central to the success of a formal inter-organizational relationship. There are a number of possible coordinating mechanisms for an IOR: Member organizations may chose to formalize the joint effort by the development of a contract that clarifies each member's role, responsibilities and organizational domain

(Jellison, 1981; Louis, 1977; Peart, 1977; Upchurch and Fischer, 1980).

Second, member organizations may chose to create a new organizational entity, that would be responsible for the administration of the IOR activities and programs (Chin, 1974; Martorana and Kuhns, 1981; Neghandi, 1971).

Another alternative is for member organizations to plan IOR activities cooperatively, but with the agreement that the proposed activity belongs to one member organization (Meyer, 1978; Mintzberg, 1979; Robey, 1982; Whetten, 1981). As a final example, member organizations may decide to conduct all IOR functions and activities coolaboratively, with all parties assuming mutual and equitable responsibility for IOR planning and IOR operations (Baker, 1981; Clark, 1981; Crandall, 1977; Dalin, 1977). This latter coordinating mechanism is, of course, the most difficult and the most promising.

The selection of a particular coordinating mechanism is influenced most importantly by the strength of the University's belief in the professional value of school system input into the educational decision-making processes. Similarly, school systems must indicate respect for University involvement in their local educational decision-making processes.

Reinterpretation of Available Resources

Educational institutions today --be they Universities or local school systems-- are faced with declining enrollments and with a consequent decrease in organizational resources. Thus, it is unlikely that any of the member organizations in the University-school system IOR will be able to make a substantial financial contribution to the cooperative arrangement. Therefore, University administrators need to plan an IOR differently than they would plan internal, autonomous operations.

First, use of facilities and contributions of staff time need to be recognized as legitimate resource contributions to the IOR. Second, functions of the IOR might be identified in terms of eliminating duplication of specialized services in each of the member school systems. For example, the IOR might facilitate the collaborative training of principals in how to accomodate handicapped children in school buildings. If school organizations pool their resources and deliver services cooperatively, they may save money in the long run.

It has been posited that organizations do not become "truely" committed to an inter-organizational relationship unless and until each makes a financial contribution to the IOR. However, participants in the Maryland study indicated that despite their initial inability to directly allocate funds to this kind of external arrangement, they would have greater flexibility to provide financial resources during the course of the IOR program development activities. These allocations could be handled as part of different sub-unit administrative budgets. Also, all members of the Maryland IOR agreed that significant contributions of staff time was an important indicator of both University and school system commitment to the IOR. Thus, the changing resource environments of educational institutions seem to have caused a re-evaluation of what constitutes a significant resource contribution to an IOR, and broadened the definition to include more than financial contributions as powerful indicators of commitment.

While all of the preceding structural characteristics of an IOR must be attended to in the design of a successful IOR, University and school system planners are not yet finished with this complex task. Indeed, from

the onset of the IOR planning process. administrators must also attempt to delineate the interaction processes in the IOR in such a way that each member organization has an equitable opportunity to participate in the collaborative decision-making process.

Involvement of Individual Representatives

In designing an IOR, University administrators need to be aware of the complexity of the interactions that occur among the individual representatives of each of the member organizations. IORs are designed by people who carry with them to the interaction a set of personal agenda. Moreover, the same individuals will function at some times in a personal role and at other times in an organization representational role.

In fact, these individuals typically use their participation in the IOR as a means to accomplish personal goals in their own home organizations. At the same time, when these individuals serve in an organizational role, they function in the IOR interaction as supporters of the IOR, as advocates for their own organizations' needs, and as protectors of their own organizations' domain. Thus, they bring to the inter-organizational relationship two sets of expectations: the first relates to their own independent organizational goals; and the second relates to their interest in sustaining the inter-organizational arrangement. Importantly, there are instances when these two sets of competing role expectations are not congruent, and do not allow them to make decisions that are in the best interests of the joint effort.

Characteristics of the IOR Interaction Processes

If the IOR is to serve as a catalyst for the development of multiple and

complex interactions between the College of Education and the local school systems, then the ways in which the member organizations will relate to each other must be carefully defined during the IOR design stage. For example, IOR interaction processes are greatly influenced by the degree of formality of the inter-organizational arrangement. Formality is defined as the extent to which each member organization has officially sanctioned its participation in the IOR. The IOR interaction processes are influenced by the degree of formality of the relationship among member organizations.

In the Maryland program, the Superintendent, or chief school officer, from each of the school systems had officially approved of his/her system's participation in the IOR: they subsequently appointed high level administrators to serve as their representatives to the IOR Policy Board. In the University system, the chairman of the department was actively involved in the IOR, with limited involvement of the Dean and Provost in the initial planning decisions. Because the organizational representatives appointed to the policy board were from the top administrations of each organization, they had the potential to coordinate the transactions that would occur between their own organizations and other participants in the arrangement. The degree of coordination of interactions within the member organizations, then, is another indicator of the degree of formality present in the IOR interaction processes. In sum, the formalization of the IOR interactions serves to provide legitimacy for the actions of member organizational representatives both when they act as organizational representatives to the IOR, and when they serve as IOR representatives in their own separate systems.

Another concern of the design of IOR interaction processes is the patterns of influence present in the relationship. Each member organization's domain must be acknowledged, and consensus must be reached on organizational prerogatives in defining and operationalizing the IOR goals. Agreement about the appropriate role and scope of each member organization in the inter-organizational arrangement (or domain consensus) is a necessary prerequisite for building cooperative interaction processes in the IOR.

On the surface, the goals and philosophies of colleges of education and local school systems would appear not only to be compatible, but also similar. Each teaches. However, each party in this interaction brings to the training process a professional orientation that values differently research-based knowledge and experience-based knowledge about the teaching/learning process. IOR interactions, therefore, must necessarily be shaped to allow for the presence of both orientations. The achievement of domain consensus in an inter-organizational relationship may be dependent upon clear understandings about the degree of compatibility of member organizations' goals, reference orientations and philosophies. Moreover, effective collaborative arrangements will develop only when the inter-organizational transactions are not dependent upon the use of power and status differentials among member organizations. In sum, organizations such as colleges of education and local school systems that appear to operate in similar domains may need to be particularly careful in negotiations around the domains that they will share, as well as the domains that will be reserved to individual member organizations.

It was in this area that the Maryland collaborative program experienced the most difficulty. The issues surfaced in terms of the content of courses and the focus of the dissertation research, and they were expressed as the presence or absence of commitment to the "field-based" orientation of the program. University faculty struggled with problems surrounding perceived differences between the campus EdD program and the field EdD program. Students complained about some professors' unwillingness to relate their theory-based teaching to the practice of school administration, particularly as it is practiced in the participating school systems. Indeed, while representatives of each participating organization articulated an interest in bridging the gap between theory and practice of administration, the actual practice did not meet this expectation. Admittedly, this is a goal which creates problems in all of our professional practice, and therefore is not the sole responsibility of one collaborative program; nevertheless, these issues of "who gets to say" and whether disputes are negotiated or decided unilaterally are bound to surface quickly in the kinds of University-school system IORs that we are talking about designing.

In retrospect, I think we would all agree that some honest challenge of current individual organizational practice --at both the university and school system levels-- is a desirable outcome of this kind of IOR. I would stress that such behavior will not be acceptable to IOR member organizations, unless there is prior agreement about it. In addition, an organizational participant in an IOR seeks to form exchange relationships that cost the least in terms of autonomy and power. Thus, the designers of IORs also need to identify superordinate goals and interaction processes for the IOR which would obviate

individual organizational concerns about loss of autonomy and power.

Simply stated, the ways in which IOR members relate to each other and to the IOR, as well as the ways in which the IOR relates to its member organizations, are crucial to achieving a collaborative inter-organizational arrangement. All elements in the procedural model that I have outlined here today contribute to designing a University-school system formal relationship that will use collaborative decision-making processes to define and meet IOR goals. Thus, it is important that member representatives bring to the joint effort the official sanction and support of their home organizations for the IOR. Also, when IOR members interact in order to develop a joint activity, resources will be exchanged. Participating organizations will both contribute resources to the IOR activity and receive resources from the IOR activity. As long as each member believes that the exchange between what is received and what is given to the IOR is equitable, then collaborative decision-making may be achieved. In order for the exchange to be perceived as equitable, members will also have to agree on their respective spheres of influence in the meeting of IOR goals. The manner in which participating organizations share the IOR authority will also predict and provide the degree of collaborative interaction present in the inter-organizational relationship.

When IOR members' organizational prerogatives have been factored into the inter-organizational relationship, the IOR planner will have achieved a base level of agreement upon which more intensive interactions, and more complex linkages can be developed and planned, to the benefit of the individuals and the organizations involved.

Identifying Local Conditions for Successful Collaboration

The central thesis of this paper is that the formation of viable inter-organizational arrangements with local school systems can provide University administrators with a mechanism through which they might foster personal and organizational renewal within their institutions. A procedural model for designing formal inter-organizational relationships that have a collaborative focus has been suggested. I must stress that the use of an inter-organizational arrangement is, in my judgement, only one of many options available to improve the conditions of professional practice in schools, colleges and departments of education. In order to provide you with a way to match your present situation with the proposed IOR intervention strategy, I will review the over-arching concerns in the procedural model that seem to be the best predictors of whether or not designing an IOR is an appropriate strategic choice for you.

The Presence of "Service" as One of The Significant Missions in The Institution of Higher Education

Publicly supported or state institutions of higher education are more likely to have, as a part of their organizational purpose, service to particular educational constituencies in a geographic region than are private institutions. Because IORs are most easily designed around service delivery needs, they may be a more appropriate intervention strategy for public educational institutions. In addition, these organizations have the legitimacy to appeal to state legislatures for support of the IORs programs and activities.

The Ability to Engage in Collaborative Decision-Making About IOR Policies and Programs

Decisions about the work-scope for the proposed IOR that would allow for collaborative decision-making are critical. Some institutions of higher education have official policies that consider decisions about academic matters to be solely and exclusively an internal organizational prerogative. In fact, the presence of this condition would prevent the University administrator from entering into an agreement that may, for example, impact on the content of academic courses, as was our experience in the Maryland program. In this event, the formation of an inter-organizational relationship with the local schools would not be an appropriate intervention strategy.

The Willingness to Negotiate a Formal Agreement About Collaborative Decision-Making in The IOR

Inter-organizational relationships are most successful when collaboration is the focus of the interaction among participating organizations. Indeed, the collaborative process is influenced most importantly by the strength of the University's belief in the professional value of school system input into the educational decision-making processes. The absence of such values and norms in the culture of the higher education institution (or the potential for them) would obviate the ability of the University administrator to design an effective IOR --one which would contribute to organizational renewal activities.

The Direct Involvement of The Top Administrator in The Planning and Design of The IOR

The University administrator who plans an IOR must have a high position in the academic organization. In a college of education, for example, the Dean or Associate Dean is the most appropriate person to initiate the IOR effort.

It is the Dean who has the authority to reallocate and redistribute resources and staff within the college to the IOR functions and activities. Second, involvement of the Dean signals both symbolically and operationally to faculty and staff the importance of the IOR effort and the need for their cooperation and participation. Moreover, it is the Dean who has the final authority both to commit the College of Education to a proposed superordinate goal for the IOR, as well as to use the achievement of that IOR goal as a vehicle for faculty development and organizational renewal. Thus, if the top University administrator does not have the time to be personally involved with the IOR, then the IOR will not become an effective intervention strategy.

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Planning an Inter-Organizational Relationship

Barbara A. Intriligator
University of Maryland - College Park

I. Deciding to Plan an IOR

A. Assessment of Resources

1. External Resources

- a. Number and Type of Resource Sources Available for the IOR Outside the Organization
- b. Potential Resources Available for the IOR Outside the Organization

2. Internal Resources

- a. People, Programs and Monies Available for Use in the IOR
- b. Level of Institutional Support

B. Assessment of The Cooperative Environment

1. External Cooperative Environment

- a. Support for Inter-Organizational Arrangements External to the IOR Member Organization
- b. Legislated/Mandated Relationships vs. Voluntary Relationships

2. Internal Cooperative Environment

- a. Incentives For Participation in the IOR
- b. Level in the Institution That Planning the IOR Takes Place
- c. Prior Institutional Participation in IORs
- d. Other Institutional Arrangements With Each IOR Member Organization

3. Agreement on a Superordinate Goal For The IOR

- a. Initial Purpose(s) of Member Organizations For Joining
- b. Initial Purpose(s) of Representatives of Member Organizations For Joining

- c. Awareness of the Characteristics of Each Other Member's Organization (Goals, Services, Resources)

II. Designing the IOR

A. Characteristics Of The Structure Of The IOR

- 1. Types of Coordinating Mechanisms
- 2. Demographic Characteristics of Member Organizations
 - a. Structural Similarity
 - b. Geographic Location
 - c. Size of The IOR
- 3. Availability of Resources For the IOR
 - a. Amount and Kind of Resources Provided By Each Member Organization
 - b. Amount and Kind of Resources Provided To Each Member Organization By the IOR
 - c. Possibilities of Obtaining External Funds For Support of IOR Activities

B. Characteristics Of The Relationships In The IOR

- 1. Involvement Of Individual Representatives Of IOR Member Organizations
 - a. Definition of Role
 - (1) Personal Role vs. Representational Role
 - (2) Personal Agendas Of The Actors
 - b. Reasons For Involvement In The IOR
 - (1) Initial Reasons For Participation In The IOR
 - (2) Personal Commitment To The IOR and/or To IOR Functions
- 2. Characteristics of The Interaction Processes In The IOR
 - a. Formality (the extent to which official sanction has been given to the interaction by each member organization)

b. The Inter-Organizational Exchange Process

- (1) Standardization (the fixedness of the exchange process)
- (2) Intensity (the amount of the resource investment)
- (3) Reciprocity (the direction of the interactions)

c. Patterns of Influence in the IOR

- (1) Domain Consensus (agreement about the appropriate role and scope of each IOR member organization)
- (2) Power and Authority Issues

d. Levels or Stages of Interaction

- (1) Multiplicity and Complexity of Ties
- (2) Loose Coupling

III. Outcomes of Planning the IOR

A. Operationalization of IOR Functions and Activities

B. Institutionalization of the Inter-Organizational Arrangement